

**DEPARTMENT OF DEVELOPMENTAL SERVICES**

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**EARLY START HELPS INFANTS AND TODDLERS WITH DEVELOPMENTAL  
DISABILITIES AND THEIR FAMILIES****PROGRAM SEEKS TO HELP CHILDREN AT RISK OF  
DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITY****FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**SACRAMENTO** - Children ages birth to three years with developmental disabilities, or those at risk of developmental disability, can receive an "Early Start" in the State of California. As one of the nation's largest and most diverse early intervention systems, Early Start will coordinate the provision of early intervention services to more than 40,000 children this year. Early Start is an interagency system of coordinated services administered by the Department of Developmental Services (DDS) as the lead agency, in collaboration with the California Department of Education.

This month, DDS joins Governor Gray Davis in declaring March 2001 as Early Start Month. Early Start Month reflects the collaborative efforts of parents, early intervention professionals, and state agency personnel to enhance early intervention services for infants and toddlers at risk of or with developmental disabilities and their families. This significant endorsement of California's early intervention service system supports and acknowledges the many parents and professionals who participate daily in the activities of Early Start.

Family Resource Centers/Networks (FRC/N) are a vital component of California's Early Start system. Through the dedication of parents and professionals, California is one of the few states with a structured, statewide system of family support services. Each FRC/N is unique, reflecting the needs of the families in their community and maintaining the crucial link for families to resources and supports. This parent-to-parent support helps strengthen a family's ability to fully participate in service planning and enhances their capacity to care for their infants or toddlers. Among other functions, FRC/N's:

- provide supportive services including education and training to families with children who are at risk of, or are experiencing, delays or disabilities;
- encourage parent awareness by linking families with appropriate services in their communities;
- promote parent and professional collaboration by acknowledging the family's central role in all aspects of the decision-making process; and
- provide a coordinated network of parent-to-parent support groups throughout California.

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Early intervention services are provided by regional centers and local education agencies throughout California. Early intervention services delivered within the context of the family can:

- improve both developmental and educational gains;
- reduce the need for special education, rehabilitation and health care in the child's future;
- reduce feelings of isolation, stress and frustration that families may experience;
- encourage children with disabilities to grow up to become productive, independent individuals.

Early detection and identification of children at risk are of primary importance. "Recent research has demonstrated that significant brain growth occurs during the first three years of life. We are grateful for Governor Davis' support of the importance of early intervention for our youngest and most vulnerable Californians," said Raymond M. Peterson, M.D., Chair of the State Interagency Coordinating Council on Early Intervention.

The Early Start program receives approximately \$45 million annually from the federal Department of Education under Part C of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. Since the implementation of Early Start in 1993, more than 107,000 infants and toddlers at risk of and with developmental disabilities have benefitted from early intervention services. Families who think their child may be at risk of developmental disability can call **1-800-515-BABY**.

*For a list of free Early Start brochures and other early intervention materials, contact Early Start Resources, 429 J Street, Sacramento, CA 95814  
Telephone (916) 492-4025 or (800) 869-4337 Fax (916) 492-9684*

**Governor Gray Davis' Early Start Month Proclamation can be viewed at DDS' Internet Home page:** <http://www.dds.ca.gov>

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